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ABSTRACT

A method for analyzing instructional techniques employed during reading group instruction is reported, and the characteristics of the effective reading teacher are discussed. Teaching effectiveness is divided into two categories: (1) how the teacher acts and interacts with children on a personal level and (2) how the teacher performs his instructional duties. Teacher behaviors in the affective and cognitive domains are considered. To combat the inefficient and ineffective uses of instructional time, a Guide for Observing Reading Instruction was developed. Designed to be used by two observers, data are to be collected in the following areas: (1) time spent in teacher talk, (2) time spent in student talk, (3) number of interchanges between teacher and student, (4) time each student talks or reads aloud, (5) types of teaching activities, and (6) approximate time spent on each activity. Uses of the guide, notational procedures, and examples are presented. References are included. (WB)

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ANALYZING CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION IN READING

Any discussion of the essential components of an effective reading program will surely include one or more of the following elements: 1) the students, 2) the teacher, 3) teaching method, 4) instructional materials, and 5) ancillary personnel and resources, e.g., the librarian and the library. Research findings have made it abundantly clear that the single most important element is the teacher (1) (2) (5). All of the other factors are important, of course, but pupil success or failure is directly related to teacher effectiveness.

But what are the characteristics of an effective reading teacher? How does one become a successful teacher of reading? It goes without saying that indisputable answers to these questions have not yet been discovered, but there is available much knowledge to guide those who would heed it. This report will present some of this information along with suggestions for incorporating it into teaching behavior.

In this discussion, teaching effectiveness will be divided into two categories, what the teacher is--how he acts and interacts with children on the personal level--and what the teacher does--how he performs his instructional duties. These categories are roughly parallel to the affective and cognitive domains of behavior.

Research with teachers in general furnishes some insights into affective behaviors that might reasonably be generalized to teachers of reading. A succinct review of this research is provided by Hamacheck (4).

Investigations of the personal characteristics of teachers revealed that effective teachers have a sense of humor, they are fair, empathetic, more democratic than autocratic, and they have good rapport with students on an individual or group basis. Effective teachers also view themselves

as being related to people rather than withdrawn. They feel adequate, trustworthy, wanted, and worthy rather than the opposite of these feelings. In addition to feeling good about themselves, teachers who are effective have a more positive view of students and adults and a more accepting attitude toward the ideas and values of others.

The classroom behaviors of effective teachers seem to reflect more of the following characteristics: (4, p. 342)

"1. Willingness to be flexible, to be direct or indirect as the situation demands.

2. Ability to perceive the world from the student's point of view.

3. Ability to personalize their teaching.

4. Willingness to experiment, to try out new things.

5. Skill in asking questions (as opposed to seeing self as a kind of answering service).

6. Knowledge of subject matter and related areas.

7. Provision of well-established examination procedures.

8. Provision of definite study helps.

9. Reflection of an appreciative attitude (evidenced by nods, comments, smiles, etc.)

10. Use of conversational manner in teaching--informal, easy style."

Harris (6) reports on several studies that relate specifically to reading instruction. In a study comparing a language experience approach with a skills-centered approach, it was found that teachers in the former method received good results with praise and poor results with criticism. Teachers in the skills-centered approach seemed to get better results when

they avoided excessive praise or criticism and concentrated on skills instruction.

From other studies Harris drew these conclusions:

1. Mild criticism does not seem to effect achievement, but strong criticism negatively effects achievement.

2. No relation between the frequency of use of praise and achievement in general has been found.

3. Praise seems to be more effective when issued in relation to a specific student contribution.

Very few are the studies that have investigated the specific instructional activities of reading teachers, and even fewer have checked the relationship between these activities and student achievement.

Harris (6) reported that good achievement tends to be associated with a high level of verbal interchange between teacher and students. Such an interchange supposedly indicates an active discussion between teacher and pupils, probably with an exchange of questions and answers.

Whereas Harris did not report on the nature of the questions asked in the verbal interchange, Guszak (3) did analyze the questioning strategies of reading teachers. He did not, however, correlate these strategies with student achievement.

The initial task in Guszak's study was to categorize the types of questions teachers ask in reading lessons. He found that most teacher questions were of the following six types:

1. Recognition--locating information from reading context.

2. Recall--recalling a fact previously read.

3. Translation--changing words, ideas, and pictures into different symbolic form.

4. Conjecture--anticipating what will or might happen without providing a rationale.

5. Explanation--providing a rationale for a response based on the context or even going beyond the context.

6. Evaluation--makes judgments based on values rather than fact or inferences.

From his observations in a number of second-, fourth-, and sixth-grade classrooms, Guszak found the 56.9 percent of all questions asked were of the recall type. Recognition questions were asked 13.9 percent of the time, and 15.3 percent were evaluation type questions, but most of the evaluation questions could be answered by a simple "yes" or "no" and required little depth of thought. Conjecture and explanation questions, which require a higher level of thinking, constituted only 6.5 and 7.2 percent, respectively, of the total questions asked.

In concluding, Guszak pointed out that most of the recall questions focused on trivial facts from the story. These questions tended to lead children away from the literal understanding of the broad text which should be the goal of comprehension instruction. He also warned that teachers who encourage the unsupported value judgments that are called for in evaluation type questions may be conditioning students for irresponsible citizenship. To combat this illness in questioning strategies, Guszak recommends that teachers tape record their lessons and listen to them carefully afterwards.

A constellation of teaching procedures and teacher skills were found to be associated with high reading achievement in studies by Pescosolido (7) and Wade (8).

Pescosolido observed twenty-eight fourth grade teachers twice each in an attempt to assess their teaching performance when teaching reading. He then measured the reading achievement of the students in these classes with the California Reading Test. The correlation between gains in reading and the teacher rating was .74. Seven teaching procedures were found to have a high relationship to growth in reading; (1) systematic and meaningful vocabulary development, (2) availability and use of a variety of instructional materials, (3) making appraisals of pupil attitudes toward teaching, (4) provision for a constructive independent reading program, (5) development of purposes for reading, (6) reading silently prior to oral reading, and (7) adequate preparation by the teacher for the reading lesson.

Wade constructed an instrument to test a group of teacher skills used in reading instruction in grades two through five. These skills included choosing and evaluating teaching materials, diagnosing and correcting deficiencies in certain skill areas, judging pupils' reading ability, evaluating pupil progress, and grouping homogeneously for instruction. The test was administered to a group of employed teachers, to student teachers with sixteen weeks' teaching experience, and to a group of undergraduates in education. On the test the employed teachers outscored the student teachers who outscored the undergraduates. In addition, it was found that children taught by teachers who scored in the highest quartile made significantly greater gains in reading achievement than did students taught by teachers from the lowest quartile.

From these research investigations, at least two conclusions can be drawn: 1) teachers are the success ingredient in reading instruction, and 2) teachers do differ in their teaching effectiveness, and these differences are detectable in pupil achievement.

Just exactly what it is that makes the difference in teaching effectiveness has not yet been definitely established through research. But do we need research to tell us what makes reading teachers effective? The real need now is to put into practice those things that are already known about good reading instruction. A review of some of these "knowns" in the cognitive domain of teacher behavior might be helpful at this point.

1. To read, children must be able to recognize words and get meaning from these words.

2. To do these two things effectively, children must master a wide variety of intricate skills.

3. It is the responsibility of the teacher to know these skills and to teach each child so that he masters them.

4. To fulfill this obligation, teachers must know the needs of each child and provide instruction appropriate to these needs.

5. Children's needs, not books or curriculum guides or grade level designations, must determine the instruction children receive.

It will be noted that these teacher behaviors are very similar to those Wade found to be significantly related to high reading achievement.

A teacher who respects these imperatives of good instruction will structure his reading program in the following manner:

1. Begin the instructional program with a diagnosis of the specific reading needs of each child.

2. Design all lessons or learning experiences to meet the needs identified through diagnosis.

3. Define in precise terms what it is that children are to learn in each lesson.

4. Teach to accomplish these objectives, avoiding tasks that frustrate pupils and tasks that do not contribute to the accomplishment of the objectives, e.g., meaningless recall questions.

5. Following the lesson, evaluate to determine what <u>each</u> child knows, not just what the "answering" students know.

6. Plan the next lesson on the basis of this evaluation.

Compare this approach with the typical reading program:

1. Teachers have scores from a readiness test or achievement test or the report of a previous teacher which indicates the book the child was "in" last year. This information is used as the basis for grouping even though it furnishes very little insight into the specific reading needs of individual children.

2. The next story in the book, not the needs of children, dictates the objectives of the reading lesson.

3. Objectives are stated, if at all, in general terms that defy evaluation, e.g., "to introduce vowel sounds."

4. The questions in the teacher's guide are asked even though they may not contribute to pupil learning. Guszak found in his study that on the very first attempt, children gave acceptable responses to 90 percent of the literal comprehension questions. This suggests it may not be necessary or useful to spend time on this type of instructional activity for many children have already mastered this skill.

5. Evaluation of the lesson is accomplished through oral questioning. Because all children cannot respond to all questions and because the better students do most of the answering, it makes it virtually impossible for the teacher to discover what each child knows.

6. The next lesson is planned in accordance with the next story in the book, regardless of the findings of the previous evaluation.

A Guide for Observing Reading Instruction has been developed and used by this writer and his students to investigate the nature of reading group instruction. The instrument is designed for use by a team of two observers, but it can be used by a single observer or by a teacher who has tape recorded his lesson.

Specifically, the Guide will reveal the following things:

1. The portion of time spent in teacher talk
2. The portion of time spent in student talk
3. The number of interchanges between teacher and student
4. How much time is spent by each student talking or reading aloud
5. What types of teaching activities are included in the lesson
6. Approximate percentage of time devoted to each activity.

Here is how the Guide is used by an observer team. At five second intervals, Observer One indicates whether the teacher or a student is talking or reading or if there is silence. The observer mentally assigns a number to each student and records his number each time he verbalizes so the number of times a child responds or performs can be ascertained.

Using the following categories, Observer Two records at five second intervals the types of the instructional activities that occur.

C = Comprehension development, which includes any activities intended to teach or test understanding of material read. This encompasses everything from recall of a name or simple fact to critical analysis of a selection.

R = Word recognition includes any activities intended to improve a student's skill in "unlocking" or recognizing words.

O = Oral reading by teacher or student. This symbol should be used only when there is an actual attempt to improve oral reading skill. Such instruction usually emphasizes reading for meaning, attention to punctuation, appropriate speed, enunciation, etc. When oral reading is used primarily for evaluating or improving word recognition, it should be marked "R" (word recognition). Such would probably be the case in the following types of situations: (1) when a child is asked to read to find a word that begins or ends with the same letter or sound as some other word, or (2) when the child is asked to read so the teacher can assess his ability to use word attack skills to recognize unknown words. If the primary purpose of the oral reading is to evaluate or improve comprehension, the symbol C (comprehension) should be used. When a teacher says, "Billy, read the first sentence on page 46 and tell us how Dick's goat got out of his pen," she is using oral reading to improve or check comprehension.

S = Silent reading by teacher or student. This symbol will typically be used when an entire group is engaged in silent reading. If a single child is asked to read for some word recognition or comprehension purpose, the symbol "R" or "C" should be used.

E = Enrichment activities - discussions carried on to establish background for the story to be read would be included here. Also, description of personal experiences by teacher or students. Additional information presented by teacher or pupils to supplement the story or lesson would be categorized as an enrichment activity.

L = Listening skills - any direct attempt to improve the listening skills of students would be included in this category. Caution: teacher admonitions such as "pay attention," and "listen carefully" do not qualify as direct instruction in listening skills.

Some interesting and useful insights into reading group instruction can be gleaned through the use of this instrument. A look at a representative lesson in the primary grades will serve to illustrate this claim.

One teacher taught a lesson which, according to her objectives, was to present several word recognition skills. The observational analysis

showed that less than forty percent of the lesson was devoted to these skills, while an approximately equal portion of time was spent on comprehension skills. Enrichment and silent reading activity received a combined total of twenty percent of the instructional time. No attempt was made to teach listening skills.

This lesson was discouraging for several reasons. First, it reflects the tendency of many primary teachers to spend as much or more time on comprehension activities than is spent on word recognition. Certainly comprehension is a vital part of reading, but most children who have reading difficulties are deficient in word recognition skills, not comprehension. This suggests that more, not less, time should be spent teaching recognition skills. Among those who do have comprehension problems, there are only a relative few who need the recall and/or recognition type skills that constituted a major portion of the comprehension activities in this lesson.

For a second reason this lesson gives cause for concern. The teacher apparently did not seriously intend that the lesson would accomplish the stated objectives, otherwise word recognition skills would have received a greater share of instructional time. Now, had the pupils mastered the recognition skills early in the lesson, it would have been appropriate to either stop the lesson or go on to another skill. But this was not the case, for the recognition activities followed the comprehension activities in this lesson.

The time spent on enrichment and silent reading is also perplexing. In the first place, both activities were closely related to the comprehension instruction which really increases the percentage of time spent teaching comprehension. Beyond that is the matter of how the silent reading

was accomplished. First, the story was read paragraph by paragraph or page by page with questions being asked after each reading. Only after the story had been dissected in this manner did the children have the opportunity to read the story as a whole. What possible enjoyment or connected meaning can children derive from a story read in this manner?

Judging from this lesson, and from many others observed, listening is rarely taught as a part of reading instruction. In most instances there was very little direct listening instruction. Hopefully, this skill is being taught at some other time during the day.

A check of student-teacher interactions revealed a fairly even division between teacher talk and student talk. There was a relatively high level of verbal interchanges, a factor associated with good achievement according to Harris. However, many of the student verbalisms were one word responses to a teacher question, meaning the discussion wasn't really very lively.

Further analysis of the interactions made it even more evident that the discussion wasn't very lively. Of the eight students in the group, one child spoke or read twenty-six times while another child performed only once and two others performed just three times. Four children accounted for seventy percent of the student responses.

These findings on student participation are interesting from another standpoint. There was no written assignment following the reading lesson, so if the teacher evaluated the lesson, it had to be through the oral responses of the children. How could the teacher possibly know anything about

those children who were unresponsive? And what about the child who recited twenty-six times? Did she learn anything or was she just displaying knowledge and skill possessed before the lesson even began?

What often appears to be happening in reading instruction is that teachers are placing great reliance on a basal reader or other structured instructional materials. They base their lessons on the objectives and techniques offered in the teacher's guide. When the established program seems inadequate, teachers use supplemental materials, often another basal series, but they are used in much the same way as the original program. This is not an incrimination of basal readers or other structured materials, they are useful tools. But they are only tools. There is no way that a book or series taught just as it is printed, can meet the daily needs of even a single child, much less the needs of a reading group. It is imperative that teachers adapt materials to meet student needs.

It well may be that the principal difference between effective and ineffective teachers is that effective teachers teach <u>children</u> to read while other teachers teach <u>materials</u> to children.

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